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Best Of '99: Eminem Pulls No Punches On Major-Label Debut Album

Detroit-based rapper's upcoming 'Slim Shady LP' was co-produced by mentor Dr. Dre.
By Gil Kaufman
[Editor's note: Over the holiday season, SonicNet is looking back at

1999's top stories, chosen by our editors and writers. This story originally

ran on Thursday, Feb. 4.]

Detroit-based rapper Eminem — the latest discovery from superstar

hip-hop producer Dr. Dre — said he's tired of the "great white hope"

tag being hung around his neck by a number of music magazines.

"All that sh– is already happening and I can't control it," said Eminem

(born Marshall Mathers). "I was born this color, and naturally, I'm gonna

be thrown into certain categories. In a minute, people will get sick of

it, and I'm gonna speak on it."

Already a 10-year veteran performer at the relatively young age of 24,

Eminem had been kicking around the Detroit rap scene for more than five

years before hooking up with Dre. Now, he is following in the footsteps

of Dre's previous protege, multimillion-selling gangsta-rapper Snoop Dogg.

Eminem wants you to know that "Just Don't Give a Fuck" — a track

from his major-label debut album, *Slim Shady LP*, due Feb. 23 —

isn't just empty boasting.

"The world will get offended when they listen to my sh–," said Eminem,

who recorded such potentially inflammatory tracks as "Brain Damage,"

"Guilty Conscience" and "Still Don't Give a Fuck" for the album.

"At the end of the day, I don't give a sh– what I rapped about," he said.

"I'm just having fun ... and making fun of all the f—ed up sh– in the

world."

Growing up "f—ing" poor in Kansas City and shuttling between his hometown

and Detroit much of his life, Eminem said rap was the only music he related

to as a teen-ager. After being turned on to such pioneering rappers as

Run-D.M.C., Ice-T and the Beastie Boys, Eminem performed with the Detroit

duo Soul Intent and later released his independent-label solo debut,

Infinite, in 1996.

That album and the subsequent *Slim Shady EP* featured the rapper's

mocking, exaggerated vocals to dish out provocative lyrics and harsh

put-downs. These recordings created a huge buzz in the rap underground

and eventually caught Dre's ear.

Speaking from a Los Angeles studio, Eminem boasted that Dre —

co-founder of the pioneering gangsta-rap group N.W.A — discovered

him after finding a cassette of his nasally-voiced rhymes on the floor

of the garage belonging to Interscope Records head Jimmy Iovine.

"He said the cover just caught his eye and he picked it up and just popped

it in and was like, 'Where's this d—head at?' " (RealAudio excerpt

of interview), Eminem joked.

After Eminem won a spot onstage at the Rap Coalition's 1997 Rap Olympics

MC battle and scored second place in the freestyle competition, Dre decided

to take a chance and sign him.

"Just [Eminem's] voice and what he's talking about is so different," said

Dre, who has produced such landmark hip-hop albums as his own 1992 solo

debut, *The Chronic*. "There's no doubt you need to hear him."

Dre was so enamored of his find that he conceived of a number for them

to perform together — the provocative "Guilty Conscience"

excerpt), one of three songs he produced for the album.

Eminem already has enjoyed alternative radio play and heavy MTV rotation

for his jokey "My Name Is" (RealAudio

excerpt), which spoofs both the presidential "Monicagate" scandal

and shock rocker Marilyn Manson in the video. But Dre stopped short of

saying that Eminem is already the first break-out star off the producer's

Aftermath Records roster. "I would just say that we're going to try and

build to make him [a star]," Dre explained (RealAudio

excerpt of interview).

Eminem said that "My Name Is," in which he jokes about poking his eyes

out with Nine Inch Nails and trying to figure out which Spice Girl he

wants to sleep with, is his way of introducing himself. "I lets the world

know I'm a smart-ass," he said. "It proves I can make a radio song if I

want to, without compromising my lyrics."

With years of rapping and freestyle MC battles finally paying off, Eminem

also has begun to draw high praise from fellow rap artists. Prince Be of

P.M. Dawn said he and partner J.C. were chasing after Eminem to sign him

to their label, while fellow white Detroit rapper Kid Rock was effusive

in his praise.

"The motherf—–'s dope," Rock said of Eminem. "The motherf—–'s ...

fresh as hell. Detroit's the home of the white rapper. We got love for

our honkies in Detroit.

"He's off on the same f—–g sh– I'm on ... He's a white boy who smokes

crack and grew up in a trailer park like myself."

Eminem unwittingly revealed that hard-scrabble persona during his interview

with *SonicNet Music News* by promising to "go choke them motherf—

–s"

during an unexpected cell phone call.

He said he plans to hit the road in the next few months to promote *Slim*

Shady LP and already is working on the sequel. "I want to release the

other album this year," Eminem said. "You're going to see a lot more

personal sh– on the next one."

As for the expected comparisons between himself and ex-Dre mate Snoop

Dogg, Eminem said he could see the connection and promised not to let

Dre down. "I won't disappoint [Dre]," Eminem said. "I may offend people,

but I won't disappoint them."